

EAST TIMOR : IS A SETTLEMENT POSSIBLE?

1. Yesterday I talked to a New Zealand peace researcher about whether New Zealand might be a mediator in Jakarta-Fretilin relations. The idea seemed to make sense prima facie because sections of the New Zealand government are looking for new peace roles to play and because Lange was given an effusive welcome in Jakarta earlier this year. On the other hand Lange would be reluctant to do anything which could add to the annoyance of Washington (and Canberra) with him. Other countries could possibly play the mediator role better: Singapore? Canada? Algeria? Brazil? Holland? But the prior question is: Is this a time when it is sensible to think about the search for a settlement in East Timor? I am the more actively interested in this question because I am expecting to go to Indonesia for six weeks on 2 January, to Jakarta and Jogja and perhaps to Bandung and Salatiga as well.
2. I have not been keeping up on East Timor developments in any systematic way. Have not been thorough in my reading of what the Tapol Bulletin carries on it, have not looked at Indonesia Reports all the year, and have not been talking to any of the 3-4 Australians who are well-informed on the subject. Nor have I been able to develop a clear picture of what positions were being staked out by the U.N. Secretary-General, Portugal and Indonesia in the various more or less secret negotiations among them on East Timor in 1984-85. (Has anyone written on those?) But let me sketch six reasons why I think the time may have come to explore possibilities of a settlement anew.

Firstly, the new financial stringency in Jakarta. If there is a let's-find-a-way-out-of-the-quagmire-in-Timor faction in the Indonesian military- and I have always assumed that this is at least latently so-they must surely be saying that this gives their cause a new urgency.

Secondly, the ascendancy of new academy generation people in the army leadership since the installation of Try Sutrisno earlier this year. These people surely have a generational interest in going back to the drawing board in relation to longstanding policies which are seen as failures? Isn't it possible then that they would respond positively to the suggestion that what failed in East Timor in 1983, or was botched or sabotaged, should be tried again?

Thirdly, Indonesia's leadership aspirations in the Non-Aligned Movement. There seems to be good evidence that Suharto wants to be chairman of the Movement next time. I did not follow the Harare Summit politics of this closely, but my impression is that Mochtar will have to work hard if he wants to be sure of winning on that issue at the next N.A.M. Foreign Ministers' meeting. Evidence of major concessions on East Timor would certainly make a big difference.

Fourthly, recent Philippine developments have presumably drawn the attention of some ABRI people to negotiation possibilities. I am thinking of Cory's negotiations with the MNLF and the Balweg rebels in the Cordillera as much as of those with the NPA. If I am right that Indonesia's posture towards her government is more influenced by people who say 'let's treat her as just another ASEAN leader' than by those who regard her as a dangerously Soerkarno-like anti-anti-Communist, there could well be active interest in looking

back into Indonesian history to the time when the central government and army leadership prided themselves on imaginative, flexible postures in relation to rebel movements of various kinds.

Fifthly, ^{the} effluxion of time factor. Now that 3½ years have passed since the breakdown of the ceasefire which followed the ABRI-Fretilin talks of March 1983, there could well be a disposition to try again.

My sixth point is based on little more than impressions. It seems just possible that the very factors which have made East Timor of diminished media, political, and academic interest in the last year or two, the fact that the same old record is being played over and over again there -- skirmishes, ambushes, arrests, new schools and roads, and arguments about what foreign journalists were allowed to see -- reflects a situation of stalemate which offers hope of a settlement.

3. Yes, but what sort of settlement? That is indeed the rub. Partly because so little seems to be known about what was actually being sought by the two parties in 1983 and why it was that that effort broke down. Was there a big element of mistake, as some people on each side argue? Jakarta's mistaken belief that it could split the movement and so get it to fizzle out by giving the apparently somewhat dovish Xanana a few plums? Fretilin's mistake that Jakarta was interested in serious negotiations when it was not? I am sceptical about mistake interpretations of both of these kinds. Above all, I cannot believe that it would have been easy to persuade the key people in Jakarta to get into the position where Purwanto, the panglima, was able to be photographed sitting next to Xanana, at a table draped by the Fretilin flag as well as the Merah Putih.

What seems more likely to me is that a well worked out dove strategy was being tested. The conviction I reached in 1984, after I had talked about these things to people in Jakarta, is that someone like Mochtar Kusumaatmadja or Interior Minister Supardjo Rustam had pushed actively for a dove strategy, having seen Xanana as indicating he was flexible (in the sense of ready for a settlement which involved give and take on both sides). I readily concede that that dove strategy may have had as its principal purpose the creation of an image of conciliatoriness for overseas public relations purposes. And I see it as likely that the hawks who initially opposed the experiment and later agreed that it deserved to be tried did so in the hope that it would discredit itself. But we can be sure that some hawk critics of the plan would have pointed to the political costs of negotiating with the No.1 Fretilin leader, would have anticipated the glee with which the Fretilin propagandists made use of that Purwanto-Xanana photo. So some people in Jakarta in early 1983 presumably believed in talks which would lead to concessions more far-reaching than anyone admitted contemplating.

4. What does all that mean in relation to the possible outcomes of future negotiations? What kind of settlement might be seen by a third party -- New Zealand or one of those other countries or the U.N. Secretary-General or Portugal, or the Vatican or the WCC or INGI, the International Non-Governmental Group on Indonesia -- as both achievable and desirable?

5. To be schematic about it, let me begin with three models.

Firstly, one could imagine a settlement based on Fretilin war-weariness and acknowledgement by key people in its leadership that Indonesian determination was unbreakable. That could take the form of a cease-fire accompanied by amnesty arrangements, or perhaps a series of cease-fires and amnesty arrangements with particular Fretilin leaders and soldiers who gave themselves up. It would be comparable to the arrangements which led to the winding up of the PRRI and Permesta rebellions in 1961-62.

6. Secondly, one could imagine a settlement based on a major change of political direction in Jakarta, something like the one which has taken place in Manila since February. In that situation the whole Timor embroglio might be seen by the key army leaders as it has long been seen by many opposition intellectuals, as a misadventure typical of what Suharto did badly, a case where over-confident intelligence operatives inveigled an otherwise sensible leadership into something which did untold damage to both ABRI morale and the country's good name overseas. If that were the view of a dominant majority of army leaders about the past there would presumably be vigorous arguments within that group on what should be done for the future: Is it possible to wind up the Timor war? Can we do that without catastrophic effects for our national unity? One group would presumably contend that major concessions on East Timor would weaken Indonesia's already shaky control over the larger, wealthier and symbolically far more important area of Irian Jaya. Another would argue the opposite that far-reaching concessions on the Timor issue, where Indonesia's position has always been much weaker than on Irian, 'would actually strengthen our position in Irian Jaya, because we would be turning over a new leaf in relation to world opinion, much as we did when we gave up the confrontation of Malaysia in 1966.'

My model 2 assumes that this latter group eventually wins the argument. It envisages a settlement in which Fretilin or a Fretilin-U.D.T. coalition emerges as dominant in East Timor. As far as I know the only Indonesian who has spoken publicly of an unravelling of anything like this magnitude is Abdurrahman Wahid, who argues that Indonesia should allow a UN-supervised act of self-determination in East Timor, making it clear that he has in mind something very different from the 1969 Act of Free Choice in West Irian. The UN could conceivably play a key facilitating role in East Timor. But it is equally possible that third-party facilitating roles could be played by ASEAN or by an individual Swiss, Algerian or Canadian diplomat.

The process of moving towards a far-reaching settlement of this kind might be via talks comparable to the ones in April to November 1949 between the Indonesian Republicans, the Dutch, and the people from the Dutch-sponsored federal states which led to the Round Table Conference agreement. Indonesia would eventually concede it could withdraw all or most of its troops from East Timor and allow the Fretilin guerrillas to become a principal determinant of political power there. It might allow the flag of the Democratic Republic of East Timor to be flown, while insisting that the Indonesian flag should always be flown alongside it. It might agree to sponsor the new state's membership of ASEAN, as part of an

arrangement whereby the Fretilin leaders declared themselves bound to Finland-like or Bhutan-like (Bhutan in relation to India) subordination to Indonesian foreign policy and military stances. It might also provide minimal safeguards for East Timorese like the present governor who has faithfully worked for Jakarta's interests, and for the Javanese and Balinese transmigrants.

7. The third or intermediate possibility is harder to sketch.

It assumes that war-weariness is mutual and perhaps that the Catholic leadership in Timor has achieved a position of moral ascendancy which eclipses Fretilin's. It would presumably require -- and/or contribute to -- a reduction of the power of Benny Moerdani, while assuming Suharto is still in control. One set of precedents for it lie in what Jakarta was offering in its unsuccessful negotiations with Kartosuwirjo and Kahar Muzakarin 1950-51 and in its successful ones with Daud Berureueh later in the 1950s, where it was conceded that those rebel movements had to be given an honourable part in the post-settlement dispensation. There are probably many other precedents if I could think of them. A settlement of this kind seems to be implied by what Indonesian diplomats in New York have reportedly said to Fretilin representatives there, for instance that Jakarta might under certain circumstances consider allowing a 'Fretilin administration'. It may be that the Sudanese government's 1972 agreement with the Southern rebels, a settlement to which World Council of Churches and All-African Council of Churches mediators contributed, is a model here, but I know too little about it to make any such argument.

8. As I read the situation on the ground in East Timor, Fretilin is unlikely to be interested in a settlement along the lines of the first of these models. If that is a correct reading of the overall situation -- including the level of Fretilin's unity, morale and popular support of which I have scant knowledge -- the choice is between the second and the third of my options. Should one hope for settlement along the lines of model 2, which assumes a major change in Jakarta, or explore the prospects for a model 3 one, which assumes only a much smaller shift? A difficult question, and a very ideological one. But I think it makes sense to put it aside, if only because my three options are after all no more than schematically constructed models. The real options should probably be described as falling along a continuum. And it is certain that any settlement actually achieved will be different from whatever academically sketched models and scenarios are presented for discussion.

9. In any event, it seems clear to me that the Timor war has had less international attention in the last 3-4 years than it deserves and needs. The international community has an obvious responsibility to facilitate whatever can be done to wind down that vicious war. That responsibility is all the greater for citizens of countries like Australia and America, whose governments made major contributions to the genesis of the 11 years of tragic and wholly unnecessary bloodshed.

10. What then should the international community do about East Timor? I think it is important that people with knowledge

of the area should be prompting diplomats to ask questions about the possibilities of an East Timor settlement -- especially in Jakarta, Lisbon, Canberra and Washington. Also we should be pressing the diplomats and politicians of some countries like Holland, Canada, Brazil, New Zealand, Singapore, Algeria and so on, to consider whether their government would be an appropriate one to take facilitating initiatives.

But it maybe just as important to think in terms of what NGOs can do. How much are Catholics doing to urge the Vatican to be active on this issue -- as East Timor's Bishop Belo evidently failed to persuade it to be in 1985? Are there roles the World Council of Churches could be playing, or the Christian Conference of Asia? Or the Minority Rights Group? The International Peace Research Association? Hizkias Assefa, the American conflict resolution specialist, who has written on the Sudanese settlement of 1972, argues that internationally organized NGO's have an important role to play in situations like this, complementary to the role of governments, because they can more easily talk to rebel parties.

That leads me to the conflict resolution specialists as a group, including people like the Quaker Adam Curle, Harvard's Roger Fisher and the expatriate Australian academic John Burton (who was Secretary of our Department of External Affairs in the late 40s and then a key figure in Australia's 'good offices' role in the Indonesian-Dutch contest). As far as I know none of this group have been asked to bring their expertise to bear on the East Timor problem, though they combine academic skills and practical experience in highly relevant ways. I see them as one of the global community's major resources in relation to endemic warfare of the Timor kind.

Perhaps the highest priority is that investigative journalists should look into the East Timor issue, to be able to tell the rest of us what positions the two sides have staked out at different times in the last 12½ years. They, and we, should expect to be surprised.

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